

Vesper Bells



CECIL FRANCIS LLOYD

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Vesper Bells

by

CECIL FRANCIS LLOYD



"Here the ineffable
Wrought is in love
The ever womanly
Draws us above."

Goethe.



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Dedication

To my two best friends,
Laura Annie and Maudie,
this little book is
affectionately dedicated.

To her memory who gave me my life,
And to hers without whom to enjoy it,
Is a task that with nettles is rife,
If I cannot enjoy I'll employ it,
I gratefully offer what's best
In this book, they will pardon the rest.

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THE FIGHTER

By C. F. LLOYD

He values no pleasure
This earth can afford
Like the foot in the stirrup,
The hand on the sword,
The surge of the blood
As the steel glitters bright,
While the shrapnel comes over
To left and to right.
With a rush past the barking machine guns he goes.
There's no joy like the joy that the fighting man
knows.

Now it's steel against steel
And a message is thrown
That tells you his arm
Is as stout as your own.
A twist of your wrist,
The hot spurting of blood,
You glimpse the white face
Of your foe in the mud,
Glaring up through the tangle of hoofs, half per-
plexed.
Something clutches your heart as you ride at the
next.

But death leaps inside
The red guard of your steel:
You feel a sharp pang
From your head to your heel.
You know by sure instinct
Your fighting is done;
Never more will you ride
In the wind and the sun,
Yet you shout as the blood gushes, red as a rose.
There's no joy like the joy that the fighting man
knows.

GROWTH

Death has no power to give that faith the lie
We owe to dust that once was hands and eyes,
Brave heart, and all the beauty lovers prize.
For, like the pale forget-me-nots that die,
Trampled beneath November's bitter sky,
Man's flesh is a poor blossom that defies
Death's frost a summer day or two then hies
To earth's strong hands to be remade thereby.

We crush the flower that perfume may remain.
When Love's sweet body in the earth is laid,
One feels along the blood and in the brain
A new communion, greatly unafraid
Of little Death and all his goblin train.
For love's enlargement body's death has paid.

ON AN OLD WOMAN DYING IN HER SLEEP

She washed her dishes, blacked her stove,
Swept the floor and dusted a chair;
Glanced in the tins of pepper and clove
And ironed a cap for her thin, gray hair:
Then went to bed at half past nine,
Just as the moon began to shine.

Loudly the bustling robins sing,
Dewy dawn comes, cool and sweet.
Passes a spirit on sombre wing.
The sleeper shudders from head to feet.
The old clock ticks, as old clocks will,
The heart and the wrinkled hands are still.

VALE, CLEMENCEAU.

Let silence reign within that Vendean wood, save
when a wind of France
Makes some wet pine bough, tossed towards the sun,
flash like a threatening lance.
Speech in his mouth was as a sword laid bare,
sharpened to slay the foe.
May his grim dust breed tigerish men, on France,
a tiger's strength bestow.

SEPARATION

Suggested by an inscription on a headstone in
Brookside Cemetery, Winnipeg.

Sixteen years old and I, a bride,
Lay with a husband by my side.
A year went by and now I know,
Dreaming under the clay and snow,
What it means to be a wife,
To give your life for another's life;
A life that only a day endures,
A heart that flutters and stops with your's.
The neighbour's arms were warm and stout,
Shoulder high they carried me out
Across the garden, down the lane,
over the prairie, through the rain.
The years will pass and one may come,
Now and then, with lips grown dumb,
To wonder how in my sullen bed
I dream the dreams of the quiet dead.
I do not grudge him money or farm.
I do not grudge him a woman's arm,
Or a child to dance upon his knee,
With eyes that will make him think of me.
The dead grudge nothing to living men.
Ours is a wisdom past your ken.
Heart of my heart, you must not ache,
Only a little, for my sake.
I want you strong to work and live,
To give the best you have to give.
It seems a pity I went away,
I should have been so proud to stay.
Life is so pleasant, death so cold,
When you're seventeen years and six months old.

STARLIGHT

Gentle as dew at evening,
Or light at earliest dawn.
Gentle as a mother's hand
From her babe's hand withdrawn,
When sleep falls on small eyelids
And breathing quieter grows;
So gently draws the starlight
Across the evening's rose.

Brave are the stars in winter
As swords of heroes old:
But fairer are the stars of May
Above young lambs in fold.
'Twas in the moon of lilacs.
Young day stood at the door,
When gently passed the starlight
From one who woke no more.

UPON RECEIVING A PINK ROSE FROM A
LITTLE GIRL

When the blush that enlivens my Sylvia's cheek
Has faded for ever and aye;
And solemn philosophers painfully seek
To prove what is mortal must die.
Not a tear will I shed o'er the exquisite bloom
Pale Death has concealed with his snows;
For surely a monarch might envy its doom,
To fade and return as a rose.

LINES FOR ANY CENOTAPH TO THE MEN
WHO FELL IN THE WAR

This is to remind you as to work or play,
Gay or in sombre mood, you pass this way;
That far from here, in pain and misery,
We passed from time into eternity.
This stone will crumble, iron rust, but men,
Their deeds remembered, seem to live again.
Vain are these honours, vain were all our pains,
If to destroy your children war remains.

TO DONN. BYRNE
AND THE NOBLE COMPANY OF ARTISTS AND
ARTISTS' FRIENDS, WHO DIED YOUNG

The fairest flower has ever briefest life.
The brightest day becomes too quickly old.
The sky-aspiring flame of worthy strife
Drops into ashes and grows sudden cold.
The light that on the mountain tops doth burn
Flies the approach of ever-greedy night.
All lovely things too early must return
To earth, fair victims of her moody spite.
But who would not prefer to be a rose
One honeyed day of summer's golden prime,
To the dull lichen that unheeded grows
On tombstones even to the end of time?
Better be beauty for an hour than be
Dullness and dust for all eternity.

SLEEP

Sleep to my cradle came, when I was young,
Sweet as a rose leaf drifting down the wind;
Hushed the insistent babble of my tongue
And laid a wood-pool's stillness on my mind.
Sleep came to me adown the vale of youth,
A gentle moth adrift on starry wings,
And my fierce greed for joy-adventure, truth
Surrendered to the peace oblivion brings.
Sleep came to me when I was growing old,
A lady with a poppy in her hand,
Nor eating cares nor troubles manifold
That blossom's subtle fragrance could withstand.
Soon a more potent anodyne will steep
My brain in God's best gift, unbroken sleep.

HELEN

When Death claimed Helen of the golden hair,
An awe-struck whisper passed, beauty is dead.
Even the milk-white almond blossoms shed
Into the pool's translucence seemed less fair
Than when the glory of the queen was there.
Men eyed the curves of many a lovely head,
And listened, heart-sick, to the lightfoot tread
Of buoyant youth, but all the world was bare.
Years passed, then travellers in distant lands
Caught in a sunset's splendour or the rose
Of dawn, a hint that only memory gives.
Again they saw the cool uplifted hands
Hover above the brow's divine repose,
And with sudden thrill cried, Helen lives.

STATUE OF LORENZO DE MEDICI
BY MICHAEL ANGELO, IN SAN
LORENZO, FLORENCE

There is an awful beauty in that face.

He seems a young archangel on his throne,
Waiting the Doom blast in this solemn place,
Chilled by God's wrathful glance to icy stone.
Far from his giant peers in heaven, or hell,
He broods on thoughts no mortal tongue dare tell.

THE POET

A quiet man who walked an endless round
Of tedious days, or so they seemed to be
To those who never noticed his profound
Glance of discernment flash out suddenly
Upon the little world whose passing dust
Powdered his jacket with a film of gray.
Men deemed him unimportant for no gust
Of lusty fortune ever blew his way.
His brown-eyed wife was gentle as the dew,
Still as a mouse that sees the cat go by.
One morning when the dawn was breaking through
The curtains of her room he watched her die.
Then he died, long ago; now men rehearse
The limpid rhythms of his golden verse.

LIFE AND DEATH

I would not haggle meanly at the end,
When sister Death demands her fee,
But greet her bravely, like a long lost friend
Recovered suddenly.

I would not feel hot fever's venom'd teeth
Consume my flesh, like flame a brand;
Nor rust, slow dropping grain on grain, beneath
Old-age, his hand.

Better the swift assoiling of the sword
That washes out in blood all stain.
Thus the brief life is briefly underscored;
This was a loss, that gain.

Fair Death, pray come in summer when the west
Is hung with arass rich of purple fire;
And set my spirit free to soar in quest
Of heart's desire.

I still enjoy the clash of mind with mind,
The swift exchange of knightly blow for blow.
Soon in the gathering darkness I shall find
A hand I know.

TIME AND ETERNITY

The ways of a man with a maid,
The ways of a maid with a man;
Have altered never a whit
Since ever the world began.
But the way of a bird through the air
And the ways of a beast in its den
Hold secrets darker, deeper,
Than even the ways of men.

Out of the earth a germ,
Out of the void a star;
To eyes of infinite reach
There is neither near nor far.
God can afford to wait,
For the thing that is not shall be.
But man must work in haste,
The fruit of his work to see.

Beyond the ultimate sun
You will find in the ultimate glooms,
Order. The blaze of pride
Is never the light that illumines.
But after infinite watching,
With infinite patience and pain,
You will find all beauty and good
In a clod made fresh by the rain.

SUMMER PASSES

Slyly a wind slips over the hill.
In the heart of a rose a star hangs, still
As an aspen leaf when no wind is blowing.
Like a child that steals off, day is going.

The air is cold as a keen white frost,
Haunting a wild where a lamb is lost.
Gently the rose fades into gray,
Like a crumbling log when fire's away.

Day goes west with the falling dew.
Fleetfoot summer is passing, too,
Out of my garden, over the fells,
Into the land where beauty dwells.

As swallows in August, on roof and fence,
Warn us summer is hastening hence;
Ripening beauty of petal and wing
Hint to us of our westering.

Even as summer and daylight fade,
You and I, so God us aid,
Out of this pleasant light we know
Into a lovelier light shall go.

THE ARTIST

Greatly I suffered, greatly too, have sinned.

Something men owe me, little call I mine.

My flesh has felt the knife of every wind.

Men I have slain, have warmed my heart with wine

My soul has drained the sweetness from white arms,

Delicate breasts, lips' honeyed loveliness,

Virgil's immortal music, the cool charms

Of April eves, chaste dawn's divine caress.

Out of the muck and splendour of my days

Jewels I wrought and polished lovingly.

Sweet Christ me save, to you be all the praise,

If aught I fashioned shall remembered be,

To honour Beauty, golden maid, whose face

Reveals to me God's glory and His grace.

THE RIDER OF THE CLOUDS

Silver and blue against the rose of fading afternoon,
And on his wings a spectral glow, light of the rising
moon.

Delicate, swift, adventurous, a spirit framed to know
Beauty of space and light, the power of all the winds
that blow.

Glory of thought was in his speed, of thought from
words set free

To flash, like lightning, through the void of God's
immensity.

Silver and rose I watched him fade into the west, a
sprite,

Companion of the clouds that veil the jewelled breast
of night.

REMEMBRANCE

Spring's in our wood again,
 Subtle and sweet;
With beauty her sister,
 Timid and fleet.
When the snow vanishes
 Violets appear;
How can I love them,
 Now you are not here?

Some who dream foolishly
 Say you still live.
Just for one touch of
 Your lips I would give
All that men cherish,
 Ambition holds dear.
Spring is but winter
 Now you are not here.

O my lost darling,
 Forgotten by me,
Winter or summer,
 You never shall be.
All it delighteth
 My heart to be near,
Reminds me, like Maytime,
 That once you were here.

THE CONVENT

This is the house where flesh grown intimate
With spirit, sanctifies the dross of earth;
While the proud senses, like attendants, wait
On temperate Contemplation, foe to mirth.
Here reverend age and grave austerity,
Mellowed by endless prayer, by thought refined,
Repress, with no ill-meant severity,
The softer graces of the carnal mind.
But one fair maid, with still unfurrowed brow,
Sweet eyes that half remember silk and gold,
Pale blossoms fragrant on an apple bough,
A boyish glance, half bashful and half bold,
May on some April eve, when prayers are done,
Wish, for a moment, she were not a nun.

EXTREME UNCTION

Soon all the echoing corridors of sense,
Down which the songs and splendour of the world
Flung wide the folds of their magnificence,
Like golden banners to the wind unfurled;
Will be by consecrated hands sealed up,
Fit preparation for eternal rest.
Spill not a drop from life's o'erbrimming cup,
But drain it even to the worst and best.
Life is a gift and surely it was given
By one who better knows its worth than you.
Be not a brute to sudden slaughter driven,
But seize and mold the fruitful clay anew
Into some form through which it may appear,
When you are dead, that once a man was here.

FRATER AVE

I had two friends, the one was old,
The other young and gay :
The one was sky when skies are gold,
The other earth when gray.

Now golden skies are sometimes sad
Upon October eves.

The grayest earth may well be glad
Beneath the young May leaves.

One friend went west when spring was sweet
And one when leaves were brown.
If they and I should ever meet
'Twill be in Dancing-Town.

TO MARY WEBB,
Author of *Vis Medicatrix Naturae*.

Welcome, kindred spirit, searching eye and quiet
mind.

Well you know the woodland paths haunted by the
wind,

Where the bee, in golden velvet, weds the rose in
June,

And the rain drips sadly through an autumn after-
noon.

Through your eyes I see again, misty, far with-
drawn,

The blue lift of my Malverns in the gentle April
dawn.

In your vivid notes I catch the impassioned strain
Of a thrush in Mother's garden singing in the rain.

MARCH WINDS

I hear enormous noises in the night

Pass through the house to die into the dark;
Setting my wild heart shuddering with fright,

Like some old tale of witch or goblin, hark
Surely that was a foot upon the floor.

And hark again, a dreadful moan of pain.
A ghostly hand is troubling my door.

That was a sigh that passed, I heard it plain.
Primeval terrors darkly stir along

The current of my blood and lift my hair.
Around my bed mysterious faces throng,

Demonic, ah but one of them is fair;
She smiles at me, I'll slumber like a child;

Though on the plains the winds of March blow
wild.

TO A CANADIAN PHYSICIAN

DR. JOHN ERNEST COULTER

Frater ave atque vale.

By the gentle Sirmio,
Sang the lonely Roman poet,
Nineteen hundred years ago.

Frater ave atque vale.

So to-night, old friend, say I,
Mid St. James' shivering maples,
Underneath the wintry sky.

Good physician, genial brother.

Kind of heart and wise of head.

Should I need your aid tomorrow

I should miss you by my bed.

Is that laugh forever silent?

Have those hands no work to do?

God who made us knows how pleasant

Rest may prove to me and you.

Heart and limb from earth, our mother,

Man and sapling olive mould.

Heart and limb must man and olive

To her arms resign when old.

Either flake by flake dissolving

Slowly, under rain and sun ;

Or as flame ascending swiftly.

We must pass, our labour done.

High you set the daily labour

Over gold or tinsel fame.

How can any idle heaven

Signal to me through your name?

Earth to earth. How good the earth is.

As a healing memory dwell

In my mind till I, too, slumber.

Noble heart, a long farewell.

EXILE

Grand are your western prairies
On which great clouds come down,
Purple and gold in the sunset,
Beyond the distant town.
E'en to your bitter winters
The saving beauty clings
Of birds that haunt the sunrise
On white, illusive wings.

Home remains home for ever,
Wherever one may be.
'Tis for the gorse I hunger,
The salt tang of the sea,
The wee, soft bats at twilight,
Weaving their magic spells.
You hear the curlew calling
But I hear Malvern bells.

Brave is your western crocus,
Give me the daffodils
In lanes that lead to Ledbury,
Across the Malvern hills.
There sleep the folk who bred me,
The gentle folk and bold,
Whose dust is England's roses,
More precious than her gold.

